



The Blue Sheet

Practical Application of Iowa's Blueprint for Permanency Ideas by Youth for Youth Spring 2012

Every child deserves a forever family! Achieving permanence requires an unequivocal commitment from all sectors to ensure that every young person served by Iowa's child welfare and juvenile justice systems leaves those systems with safe, loving, and enduring relationships that are intended to last forever. ***Iowa's Blueprint for Forever Families 2011*** presents a framework and recommendations to guide permanency efforts. Moreover, it is a ***call to action*** for all partners to contribute to achieving permanence for children and youth.

This supplement to the *Blueprint* builds on ideas generated at the May 2011 Children's Justice Permanency Summit. It identifies concrete actions that youth can use to improve their own permanency outcomes, as well as permanency outcomes of their peers

Family and Youth Engagement

Every family and youth should have a voice. Outcomes improve when youth and parents are active participants in their own planning and service provision. When parents are empowered, guided, and supported in their parenting efforts, and when youth's opinions are valued and fostered, lines of communication open up and more candid conversations about issues and barriers to safe case closure can be dealt with in a strength-based environment.

What you can do...

- ☐ Talk to your case workers, family, friends or other trustworthy people about your problems or they can lead to more serious problems. Listen to their ideas for improvement.
- ☐ Let other youth know that they too have the ability to get involved in their case and ask for help from people like DHS, counselors, etc. Encourage them to let these people help them.
- ☐ If you have a worker and you aren't getting along with them, it is okay to speak to their supervisor.
- ☐ Ask your case worker to explain how often meetings will happen and how often you will get to see your family. This will help you reduce negative feelings like being angry, nervous, or sad.
- ☐ When you feel like shutting down, you may not want to talk but make sure you still have your ears open and are listening to what they say. You still may need to hear what's being discussed!
- ☐ Find something or someone that will get you through the tough times. This person or thing will help show you permanency even if everything else is constantly changing.

Family Preservation

First and foremost children belong with their birth families. In most cases, children and youth are best served by preserving and supporting families. Family preservation efforts include short-term, family-based services designed to assist families in crisis by improving parenting and family functioning while keeping children and communities safe. In juvenile justice, diversion strategies and home-based services recognize that youth can be rehabilitated and communities can be safe without separating youth and their families.

What you can do...

- ☐ Stay in touch with your biological siblings if possible – you can't replace these connections. However, if there wasn't an appropriate/healthy relationship before, don't be forced to continue that relationship.

- ❑ Even though your parents may be struggling with their own problems, you are still very important to them and the relationship can be beneficial for all of you. If there is limited contact with parents and/or siblings you deserve to know why. Ask your worker for an explanation!
- ❑ It is ok to finally be the child rather than the parent. Try to step down and let others help you out – it may feel like you need to protect your siblings, but it is good for you to be the child once again.
- ❑ Openly communicate with your family about what you both expect and need – calmly talk and work things out with each other, but if things get worse or difficult, don't be afraid to seek outside help.
- ❑ Your problems will not disappear when you run away, they will still be there when you come back. Listen to those who are trying to help you by giving you suggestions – even though it is sometimes hard to hear.
- ❑ Make a plan with the people at your placement for what you can do when you need a break. When tensions are high, you can step back and take some time to cool off.
- ❑ Change isn't always a bad thing – it can be good. If there is too much going on at once and it is overwhelming, talk to someone about how to cope with that change.
- ❑ Youth need to be asked who is in “their family” however they define it. If under 18 you should get to voice your opinion about who you want to stay with.

Placement and Reunification

Regardless of the reason, children are traumatized by removals from their home. When out-of-home placement is necessary, it is critical for everyone involved to engage immediately, adopt a sense of urgency, and utilize all services and individuals connected to the family to launch the reunification process. When reunification is not possible, it is critical to ensure that the youth is connected to at least one committed relationship with another loving, caring adult.

What you can do...

- ❑ DHS's main goal is to reunify you with your birth family, but that doesn't always end up happening. Ask to keep other family members involved in your life too. Know your family tree, where people live, and how to get in touch with them.
- ❑ Before going to a new placement, do some research to see if it will be a good fit for you. Talk to other youth who have lived there and see if they could vouch for the placement. Clearly communicate how you feel to your worker.
- ❑ If you are at a placement that you don't think is going well, ask for help before it becomes unworkable.

Adoption and Guardianship

Children in out of home placement who cannot be reunified need permanency. Adoption and guardianship are preferred permanency options as opposed to long-term foster care. All children and youth can be adopted regardless of their age, race, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, special need or sibling group size. When individual circumstances determine that adoption is not the best option, guardianship is another avenue to permanency.

What you can do...

- ❑ Adoption does not change who your biological family is, it just brings in new people who are willing to help out. They are not trying to take your biological family's spot, but instead just want to help you.
- ❑ If being in a family isn't dangerous or hazardous in any way, you should give it some time to see how you will like it. Try to not have negative opinions about the home before you really give it a fair chance.
- ❑ If you are thinking about being adopted, make sure it feels right and is what you want. If it isn't, then talk to your worker and see if any changes can be made.

Transitioning to Adulthood

It is never too late to achieve permanence. Older youth face a unique set of challenges and risks as they move into adulthood. When youth age-out of foster care they often lack the financial, emotional, educational, and protective support typically provided to young people in permanent, intact families. Permanence remains a vital and critical need for these young adults.

What you can do...

- ☐ The thought of turning 18 is really scary because you don't know what will happen or what changes will occur. It's okay to share these feelings with others. Don't feel like you have to hide your emotions.
- ☐ If a family member seems like they are upset with you or are distancing themselves, understand they may be trying to help you become more independent. Don't assume – ask them.
- ☐ Ask for information on different resources like Aftercare. Get information you need before your file is closed. Ask for help. Don't close doors or try to just rely on yourself - be absolutely certain that you don't need the help before you refuse it.
- ☐ Take the initiative and help prepare yourself for the next step in your life. Teachers, case worker, social workers, counselors, internet, friends, etc. can help you with this process. There are lots of people and groups that will help you, but it is up to you to ask for the help.
- ☐ Once you turn 18, keep going and trying – finish high school, go on to college, apply for scholarships. Even though things maybe haven't worked out in the best way for you so far, persevere through it and allow yourself to succeed. Don't just stop and give up.
- ☐ Support and advocacy groups like AMP aren't just for when you go through the process of aging out, but they can be there after you are living independently to make sure you succeed.